

T H E B A R R E M O N T P E L I E R
TIMES ARGUS
Established 1897

August 1, 2008

Bread and Bones Headed for the Bright Lights of Folkdom

By Art Edelstein - Arts Correspondent

It's rare that a reviewer gets an album that is flawless. The first CD from Bread and Bones has one flaw, albeit a minor one. The group should have a better name.

Bread and Bones is led by Richard Ruane, a fine singer/guitarist and superior songwriter. He is joined by Beth Duquette on vocals and Mitch Barron on electric and upright bass and backing vocals.

While this is a trio, the major talent (although they are all very talented) is Ruane. He's a performer to note. His credits include being an award-winner or finalist at the Kerrville (Texas) Folk Festival, Grassy Hill New Folk Competition, the Great Waters Folk Festival Songwriter Contest, the Mid-Atlantic Song Contest, the Plowshares Coffeehouse Singer-Songwriter Competition and Vermont's SolarFest Songwriter Showcase. This is quite a resume, and from the songs on this CD, his songwriting awards are well-deserved.

Ruane also won a "Rachel Bissex White Light Fund" scholarship to the Northeast Regional Folk Alliance Conference. The scholarships are intended for Vermont artists developing careers as performers and recording artists.

Ruane writes in a distinctly "folk" style; if you need a contemporary word then "roots" works well. This is music with substance and intelligence covering a variety of themes.

The music is delivered tastefully with Ruane's acoustic guitar carrying the lion's share of the work and Barron's bass as the aural underpinning. Ruane's guitar work is crisp and emphatic rather than limply strummed. He gets a lot of sound from his often minimalist finger-picking and chord work. Barron is every Vermont folk group's bassist of choice. His work is solid and sensitive.

Duquette's singing should not be slighted although she often takes second chair to Ruane's lead vocals. Hers is a fine clear alto in perfect step with Ruane. Together the two can sing with the best on record. This is evident on "Fair and Tender Ladies," the old English ballad sung by many folkies, one of just two songs the group didn't write for this album.

What I enjoyed about this album beyond the finely crafted songs was the lack of pretension. With just guitar and bass, an occasional mandolin, ukulele, Dobro or accordion from cameo performers, this group held my attention throughout. There is no studio gimmickry. Instead, the voices are up front in the mix, the diction is clear, the music seems to pop out of the speakers and there is a lot of space in the aural landscape.

The members of Bread and Bones have each been in a large number of different groups over the years, including Feast or Famine, Sundog, The Hibernators, Wild Branch, the Rebecca Padula Band, the Michele Fay Band and Womensing.

Between them they have shared the stage with Pete Seeger, Brooks Williams, Lynn Miles, Phish, Louise Taylor, Robin Williamson, Slaid Cleaves, Jennifer Kimball, Steve Gillette and Cindy Mangsen and Rachel Bissex.

All these various performing opportunities have honed a sound that is very confident and mature. Bread and Bones may be a new name to many Vermonters but if this CD is an example, this trio is headed for the bright lights of folkdom. They took several years to produce this first CD; I hope their next album is already in the planning stage. This CD is highly recommended.

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